The possible worlds essay

In poetry, readers often find themselves in other worlds and other dimensions – either through the poet's conscious evocation of these worlds through the images employed in the poem, or through the reader who creates a world out of the melding of what the poem says and what he thinks the poem means. Poetry consists of a continuous process of revelation. Paul Ricoeur has described poetry as "[constituting] a disclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening on to other possible worlds" (qtd. in Valdes, 489).

T. S. Eliot, one of the leading figures in modern poetry, crafted many of his poems that they appear to be gateways to other realms. Poems such as " The Second Coming" and " The Wasteland" paint dark pictures of both our current and future situations. " The Second Coming", rich with religious symbolism, describes the end of the world, and " The Wasteland" details a world where human beings are in an unremitting search for some sort of peace or contentment, yet they must resign themselves to a life of futility and despair. These poems open the door to realm fraught with turmoil and chaos, and the inevitable, depressing end.

Many readers find it difficult to be lured into this realm, perhaps fearing that it would be hard to get away once caught, perhaps anxious about abandoning the more conventional world, as we know it. Human beings have always been wary of what is strange or what is different, and yet we are enthralled by it. In literature, especially poetry, we are given the opportunity to assuage our thirst and curiosity, and what we find is amusing, insightful, sometimes distressing, other times disquieting, but always enriching, and never with an end.

We may liken this revelatory aspect of poetry to how one views a horizon – it is something that recedes whenever we move toward it, moving beyond our grasp with every step we take, and, therefore, has “ always an inexhaustible capacity” (Valdes 453). It is in this “ destination” beyond our familiar frontiers that we can find the possible worlds. And these possible worlds consist of what the poetic language offers and conjures, melding with the reader’s own potentials and experiences.

Sonnet XXVII from the second part of Rainer Maria Rilke’s Sonnets to Orpheus, asks, “ Does it really exist, time the destroyer? The poet, using the persona of Orpheus on his quest to free his lover Eurydice, questions the existence of time itself, and its power: “ Are we really so apprehensively fragile / as fate would have us believe? ” (lines 5 and 6). In this way, the poet not only allows his persona an opportunity for an epiphany, but also allows the reader to do the same. The person asks these questions, showing a glimmer of its horizon, full of possible meanings, and, in turn, the reader also asks himself these questions, and gathers input from his own horizon in the attempt to answer them.

Perhaps here, it is best that we adapt the multiplicity of interpretation, to best suit our own means, especially if we choose to make our literary experiences as acts of self-recognition. In this method, the reader creates a reading, or several, out of a whole range of readings, offered by other people, thus subverting the role of the author as “ sovereign creator” (Valdes 492). We follow the adage that there is no single correct interpretation of the text, because we interpret the text subjectively.

Readers do not have to follow a certain reading, thus eliminating the possibility to be caught in a world that has been dictated to us academically. We create meanings and interpretations based on the text, but consciously and unconsciously drawing from our own identities as we do so. This practice of reading and interpretation reveals more about what the text says and, at the same time – because the reader has applied himself to the literature – it reveals so much about ourselves, opens realms within ourselves. We identify with a character in the poem, or the general mood of the poem, and sometimes the entirety of the poem.

And so the worlds, universes and realms in poetry, they are not so strange after all. In every reading, there is a meeting between the text and the reader, between what the text claims and offers, the horizon it opens to and the possibilities it displays, and another horizon, that of the reader's horizon of expectation, experience and potentialities (Valdes 492). A more appropriate example, perhaps, is Pablo Neruda's love poems, which speak of an emotion and a condition that most people can relate to, however way they want it.

His Sonnet XI – from One Hundred Love Sonnets, crafted for his wife and muse, Matilde Urrutia – begins with " I crave your mouth, your voice, your hair". The text speaks of longing, of wanting, and hunger, all directed to the loved one. And this line, from Sonnet XVII, " I love you without know how, or when, or from where" (line 9) speaks about the seemingly senselessness of love and loving, how people in love are at a loss when pressed to give reason for what they are feeling. It is this approachable and identifiable aspect of

poetry that allows readers to confront the familiar using the poetic dimension of language.

And it is within this poetic dimension that Ricoeur calls as “ a disclosure of possibility” that we come to understanding both worlds – that of the readers’ (the actual) and the possible (the text’s) – created by the meeting of their horizons; this is where and how we arrive at a better understanding of ourselves (Valdes 490). It was perhaps the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer who said it best when he says that “ we don’t try only to understand what is in the poem but to reach the kind of world which this poem belongs or which it projects” (qtd. in Valdes 453).